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LETTER DATED 25 JANUARY 2000 FROM THE PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF PORTUGAL TO THE UNITED NATIONS ADDRESSED TO THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

I have the honour to bring to your attention the following statement on Croatia issued on 24 January 2000 by the Presidency on behalf of the European Union (copies attached in English and French).

I should be grateful if you would have the text of this letter and its annex circulated as a Security Council document.

(Signed) António MONTEIRO
Permanent Representative of Portugal
to the United Nations

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Annex

(Original: English/French)

Statement dated 24 January 2000 by the Presidency on behalf of the European Union on Croatia

Recent parliamentary elections in Croatia, and the democratic way they were conducted, have opened a new phase in Croatian politics. The European Union welcomes this development and looks forward to the presidential elections and to the formation of the new Government.

Against this background, the Council has decided to rapidly put into place the Joint European Union-Croatia Consultative Task Force, in order to start preparing the ground for future contractual relations, within the framework of the "Stabilisation and Association Process". It has also decided, as a first step towards an intensified political dialogue, to extend an invitation to the Croatian Prime Minister designate to the General Affairs Council of 14 February.

The Council is encouraged by the positive meeting President Prodi had in Zagreb on 14 January with the new leadership as well as with the acting President. The Council welcomes the Commission's intention of upgrading its representation to Zagreb as well as of sending a fact-finding mission next month, mandated to assess the needs and establish the priorities with a view to enhancing Community assistance. As soon as conditions allow it, a feasibility study on the Stabilisation and Association Agreement could be envisaged.

With a view to the perspective of Croatian integration in the European structures, the European Union expects the new Government to meet the well-known conditions necessary for a closer relationship between Croatia and the European Union: namely progress on constitutional, electoral, media and judicial reform, full respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, economic reform, active progress on Croatia's obligations under the Dayton/Paris Agreement (including refugee return and full cooperation with the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia) and a full commitment to regional cooperation. In this context the European Union puts special emphasis on the importance of Croatia's active commitment to the principles and objectives of the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe.

The European Union looks forward to working with the new Government in Croatia in order to achieve early progress on these issues and is ready to help it meet the challenges it faces in developing a closer relationship with the European Union.

The Council expresses the hope that the recent developments in Croatia will be an example soon to be followed throughout the region and will mark the beginning of a fruitful and constructive cooperation between the European Union and Croatia.